Changing Formatting in Word

These two tricks earn my vote as the best-kept secrets in Word 97 / 2000. If you're using Word 2000, they aren't quite as obtuse, but it helps to know what Word is doing, and why.

How many times have you applied formatting to a paragraph or a bunch of characters, and then changed your mind - all you want to do is get rid of the bloody mess and start all over again?

Let's look at each kind of formatting in turn ...

PARAGRAPH FORMATTING

As you all know by now - you've been reading this in my books for years, right? - paragraph formatting is stored in the paragraph mark. You don't stand a snowball's chance of figuring out how Word is formatting your paragraphs unless you can see the paragraph marks. You have paragraph marks showing, right? (Tools | Options | View tab, check the box called Paragraph marks. Check the box marked Tab characters, too, while you're at it.)

Every paragraph has a style. You can see the name of the style in the Style drop-down box, which is the first box on the Formatting Toolbar. Chances are good your Formatting Toolbar is either the second toolbar visible on your screen, or it's stuck somewhere in the middle of the Standard Toolbar, the first toolbar on your screen.

Say you've messed up the formatting on one of your paragraphs - maybe you've accidentally set it to align to the right, or you've got the before and after spacing or indent settings so turned around you can't figure out what's happening. If you want to completely get rid of all the manually applied formatting, and return the paragraph to its pristine state (that is, you want to return to the settings defined for that style), you have two options.

The first method is easy to remember, but time-consuming: you can click once inside the disturbed paragraph, note the name of the Style in the Style drop-down box, click the down-arrow on the right side of the box, and pick the same Style name. Word may ask if you want to "Update the style to reflect recent changes?" or "Reapply the style of the formatting to the selection?" If you're asked, take the second option - to reapply the style. When you're done, the paragraph will be restored to its original formatting.

The second method is hard to remember, but very quick: just select the paragraphs that are causing you problems, and hit Ctrl+Q. I have no idea why Microsoft chose "Q" for the shortcut key - maybe it's a tribute to James Bond's trickmeister? - but Ctrl+Q resets paragraph formatting, no questions asked.

CHARACTER FORMATTING

Unlike paragraph formatting, character formatting is stored with the character itself. The method for restoring character formatting to a bunch of screwed-up characters differs, depending on whether you're using Word 2000 or not.

If you're using Word 2000, simply select the characters and, in the Style drop-down box, choose "Default paragraph font" - the first choice on the list. In any version of Word, you can also use the Ctrl+Spacebar key combination to restore the characters to their default font.

No matter how you do it, Word removes all formatting from the selected characters, and returns the characters to the format defined by the paragraph style. If some of the characters have a character style, it doesn't matter: Word removes the character style completely, and imposes the style defined for the paragraph.